WESTERN-CREATED CONFLICTS IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY AS DEPICTED IN TEN PLAYS

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional drama played a very significant role in African Society before colonization and the introduction of Western culture and ideas into Africa, especially black Africa.[1] This traditional African drama, which was "oral," was a form of dramatic expression embodied in story-telling. It was a composite of speech-narrative, dialogue, music, mime and dance.

Many aspects of the culture of the African People found expression in this narrative drama. It did not exist as a separate entity from the social life but as a necessary contribution to its total fulfillment. It was an essential element of the process of living together, and the aged used it as a medium through which the young were instructed. The very nature of African societies at the time which made group cohesion very easy and spontaneous was favourable for this kind of art.

Like the theatre of Dionysus in ancient Greece, this traditional African drama derived its themes from legends and myths based on animism, ancestral spirits, taboos and mythical figures, some of which the audience was already aware of.[2] A previous knowledge of the subject-matter, however, never destroyed the effect of the art. It rather added to the enjoyment of the performances. The audience was always receptive

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1 J. H. Nketia, Ghana--Music, Dance and Drama, Institute of African Studies, Legon-Accra, 1965, p. 29.

2 Bakary Traore, Black African Theatre and Its Social Functions, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972, pp. 10-15.

as was the audience of the theatre of Dionysus who knew about most of the heroes before their presentation on the stage.

The performance always took place in the form of storytelling, and the storyteller, or the griot as he is known in Francophile West Africa was the traditional equivalent of a playwright or a producer. His art, however, was oral. He was solely responsible for its formulation and presentation.[1]

The audience was composed of members of the griot's own community or village who spoke his own language and observed the same rituals and customs from which he drew his subject or ideals. So, from his experience and vast store of intimate ideas and expressions of the village, the griot always impressed his audience. He set the scene and carried out the dialogue himself by characterizing the actors in actions and mode of speaking. His chief aids were his tone, quality of voice, manner of articulation, choice of words and the use of appropriate mime for conveying specific expressions.

Subsidiary contributions could freely be made by the audience or "chorus" in the form of individual outbursts of sympathy, surprise or disbelief; for deliberate interruption for musical or dance interludes; for comic relief or for a brief dramatization of episodes from the story.[2] At the end of the interruption the thread of the story was

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1 Saka Acquaye, African Arts, II i (1968), pp. 58-59.

2 J. H. Nketia, loc. cit., p. 33.

picked up by the griot who remained the principal character or link between the spontaneous verbal actions that took place in the course of the narration of the story. The audience always sat or stood in a circle with him at the centre, or in a horseshoe formation with him at the open. This made audience participation very intimate and flexible.

In Ghana, West Africa, for example, this traditional drama popularly known as Anansegoro or "Ananse Story" with the Okyeame as leader or storyteller, was a very common phenomenon in the traditional society.[1] Taking its name from the chief character of the story, Ananse, the Anansegoro played a major role in the shaping of the society before the influence of Western culture. Ananse could be portrayed as all-knowing, wise, sympathetic and generous. He could be depicted as treacherous, dexterous or greedy. But all these variable characteristics were always geared to teaching members of the society one kind of lesson or the other.

This in general was the nature of traditional African drama and its unique status in the society. It was an oral literature--narrative, very entertaining and at the same time very anecdotal. It could be performed anywhere without any restriction whatsoever. And the guardians of the society used it as a medium for educating their people.[2]

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1 Ibid., p. 35.

2 At that time, travelling to very distant places was very rare. But whenever anyone did travel, it was always to the nearby villages where the inhabitants belonged to the same cultural group, and spoke the same or related language. Therefore, the griot learned fewer foreign

When the first white colonials arrived in Africa around 1450,[1] they were not interested in the internal or artistic affairs of the indigenous people. Their major preoccupation was economic. They were more interested in gold, ivory, pepper and other spices which were cheaply found along the coast in great quantities. It was not until later around 1600 when the missionaries arrived and made their way inland that greater interest in the affairs of the African people began.[2] This advent was also the beginning of the cultural conflicts in Africa as portrayed in the plays discussed in this thesis. Western education and its related culture have since been in conflict with the traditional cultural practices.

Colonization and its concomitant western education slowly changed the traditional system of government and behaviour. The confined villagers developed a passion to know about other people living beyond their own villages, and even beyond their own culture. They ventured out into other regions, hitherto unknown to them, and made friends outside their own culture. Their friendship with the colonials exposed them to new traditions, ideas, beliefs, and even new languages.[3]

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ideas that might influence or change the meanings of the images, and the structure of his stories; much less the people's culture.

1 J. D. Fage, A History of West Africa, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1952, p. 54.

2 H. M. S. O. Introducing West Africa, London: He Majesty's Stationary Stores, 1952. Missionary Influence, p. 56.

3 Saka Acquaye, loc. cit., p. 59.

In imposing a European-type of education on the natives the imperialists were, of course, suiting their own administrative, political and economic convenience. The result was obvious. The system not only overtly undetermined the African tradition but gradually tried to debase it. One area of this impact of colonization is the drama of the African people which embodied almost all aspects of their culture. The traditional storyteller and his simple narrative and anecdotal drama were gradually but persistently pushed aside by the new system.

In the urban areas, the griot or okyeame lost most of his audiences, and the legends, myths, taboos and the tradition on which he based his verbal art were questioned. Consequently, he was unable to cope with the new order. In his place has emerged the younger storyteller who has grown up with the new system. He has attended the western-type of school and has acquired a new language, new ideas, some aspects of European culture, and a modern technique of telling the stories.[1] He now writes his plays in eclectic European forms and produces them on exotic stages usually behind a proscenium. His casts are those who can read and understand his script, and who are as well educated as himself.

Supported by other intellectuals in this system, the new storyteller, now the playwright, began to investigate some of the practices of the traditional society on the basis of western values. The result is that some traditional values are being questioned and what in many instances used to be the traditional code of behaviour was considered outmoded. As a result, the cultural conflicts which have resulted from this fusion

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1 Saka Acquaye, ibid., p. 59.

of cultures have become a problem and a subject matter of contemporary literature.

It has put the African elites in a dilemma. Which way are they to go? Should Africans maintain their indigenous values, inherit the Western tradition, or slowly mix the two? It is a profound problem. One interesting phenomenon is that while a greater number of the aged want strict adherence to the traditional practices, the younger generation who have grown up with the new system advocate a change of some of the cultures. In the book, Protests and Conflicts in African Literature, Cosmo Pieterse has termed this dilemma, "conflicts of generations--the old versus the new in a cultural revolution."[1]

These problems are found in various parts of the continent, and involve all facets of the society. Those that originate from family dogmatism or from ritual practices as opposed to the Western tradition pose the greatest concern to the continent and a set-back in its development. The various governments do try to regulate some situations by issuing ordinances that are designed to control some of these practices. But where these do occur, they are concerned mainly with practices that affect the government as a whole, such as the burning of forests by hunters for "bush meat,"[2] which destroys natural vegetation, farms, and in many instances, buildings. In most cases, these governmental controls

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[1]Cosmo Pieterse, Protest and Conflicts in African Literature, New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1969, p. 101.

[2]Kojo Kaleem, "Bush Burning," Ghana Daily Graphic (June 16, 1973). This problem is also dealt with in a play from the Congo, Pas De Feu Pour Les Antilopes, by Paul M. Mushiete and N. L. Mikanza. Editions Conglia, 1969.

do not bring healthy solutions since state-ways hardly change folk-ways when they are not properly enforced.

The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to take ten selected African plays and attempt, through analysis, to show how the playwrights have approached these problems which seem to have anachronistic values. These plays have been written by the younger generation who are the most affected by this cultural clash. They have become like a pendulum oscillating between Europe and Africa through a "confusion" of dissimilar beliefs and contradicting philosophies of life. The analysis of the plays will include a discussion of the traditional practices on which they are based, and the extent to which they have been influenced by Western culture. This discussion will eventually show how the playwrights, speaking for Africa today, look at these cultural conflicts in relation to the cultural and economic development of the continent.

CHAPTER I

CONFLICTS INVOLVING MEMBERS OF FAMILIES

The family is one of the most important features of African society. This central institution forms the core of the tradition and culture on which each society is based. Any outside or alien influence on any aspect of the culture, therefore, disorganizes not only the individual families, but the society.[1]

The family in most areas does not consist of the two parents with their children alone. This elementary unit very often forms part of an inseparable wider group of persons who live in the same homestead or village, and work cooperatively. The basis of this larger group is kinship traced through the parents, whether patrilineal or matrilineal. Members of this larger group include the elementary family and grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and cousins. All these people form the extended family.[2] The traditional head of this family is the oldest person from the ancestral lineage.

Thus, the father of a home within the extended family, that is, the father of the elementary family unit, may be older than an uncle, yet in

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1 J. H. Nketia, Ghana--Music, Dance and Drama, Accra: Institute of African Studies, 1965, p. 29.

2 Lucy Mair, African Marriage and Social Change, London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1969, p. 2.

some societies, this uncle will be the head of the extended family,[1] and his role is very unique and important. As the family's head, spokesman and representative at the community's undertakings, he plays a major role in the society. The people who probably rank above him are, of course, the chief and his traditional councilmen.

The chief and the heads of families are the traditional leaders of the people. They form the traditional government, and the constitution by which they govern consists of beliefs and established practices called tradition.[2] Backed by this tradition, these leaders become more or less the keepers of the consciences of the people. They are, therefore, in a position similar to that of the Pope of the Catholic Church. They as a group are considered traditionally infallible when defining behaviour just as the Pope is considered infallible when he defines doctrines touching faith and morals.

Because of this strict adherence to tradition and customs, the execution of new ideas and changes becomes extremely difficult. James Ene Henshaw's character, Chief Damba, has this to say in defense of tradition and culture: "Tradition is sacred. Custom is above all. To question tradition is sacrilege. If we do not respect tradition, how can our society stand."[3]

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1 Ibid., p. 2.

2 James Henshaw, This Is Our Chance, 9th Edition. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

3 Ibid., p. 5.

The above extract shows clearly the position of tradition in the life of the African. Tradition has made a majority of homes and communities very conservative. As a result, those who have been influenced by Western culture have always been in conflict with the traditional leaders.

One aspect of this traditional conflict involves parent-children relationships at home within the elementary family. At times, it involves the extended family, too. A child is always to obey however old he is. This is a traditional practice whereby children are seen but not heard. Everything the child does must be approved by his parents or the head of the extended family. He does not have the final say even in things which concern him personally, such as marriage or the choice of a profession. He has only to accept the girl or profession chosen for him by his parents. To question or reject their decision is to question or reject authority which is tantamount to questioning or rejecting a sacred institution of tradition.[1]

This is one of the practices which the intellectuals of the new system want changed. They want the youth to be free of some of the traditional practices and to decide for themselves, at least in problems that concern them personally.

Joe de Graft, in his play, Sons and Daughters, treats this conflict as it arises out of the choice of a career.[2] Although, the play itself is not a good one structurally, it succeeds in dramatizing the main

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[1] Ibid., p. 6.

[2] Joe de Graft, Sons and Daughters, Accra: State Publishing Company, 1962.

conflict concerning the children's choice of a career. The son in the play, Aaron, wishes to be an artist. Maanan, the daughter, dreams of becoming a dancer, more particularly a choreographer, to rescue traditional dancing from oblivion. In accordance with traditional practices, Ofosu, the father, even though he is not well educated, wants his children to study engineering and law respectively. The conflict that arises out of this is two-fold. First it becomes clear from his behaviour that Ofosu is influenced somewhat by Western ideology in choosing the particular professions, and secondly he refuses to be consistent by insisting on retaining his traditional right as a father. He is more concerned with money, honour and respect that such professions bring to a family, and in this case to him personally, than with his children's interests and innate abilities.

The children, filled with the spirit of the new system, reject their father's choices. They have already decided on their careers. This opposition on the part of the children who have obviously been influenced by western ideas generates a conflict between them and their father. It is a type of conflict in most African homes which is usually termed "conflict of generations."[1] Those in the older generation as represented in the character of the father, Ofosu, consider this disobedience, lack of filial respect, and insubordination, but to those in the younger generation, such action is a right. The character of Ofosu's wife, Hannah, further explains the status of the head of the home or family.

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1 Cosmos Pieterse, Protests and Conflicts in African Literature, New York: African Publishing Company, 1969, p. 101.

She comprehends the children's views very early in the play but she is unable to change the trend of events.

> Hannah: And I know enough to tell you that if Maanan goes on working with Lawyer Bonu, you'll regret it. She hates the idea of being a lawyer; what's more...
>
> Ofosu: That's enough, Hannah. I thought I knew what you were driving at when you started. How often must I tell that girl of mine that I disapprove of her going on the stage? A man is entitled to some obedience in his own home - from his own children. And now it seems that you, too, are beginning to doubt my good sense.
>
> Hannah: It's not that, James.
>
> Ofosu: Must I be told that to the face before I know? But this is the result of being an indulgent father. I toil all day all through the year to make enough money to educate my children, to give them the best profession that any rich man's children can have, and what do they tell me? "I don't want to be an engineer," and "I don't care about law" - as if what I am offering them was so much cow dung! And what do they want? Dancing half naked on a bloody stage and painting a lot of foolish pictures that nobody who knows the worth of money will care to pay a penny for!
> That's what Maanan and that lazy brother of hers want to do. But whilst I'm alive...[1]

She, like the children, is traditionally powerless. In her view Ofosu is not only the father of the children but also head of the elementary home. His decisions are final.

As in the choice of professions, the choice of marital partners also generates family conflicts and problems. An African marriage, like that of a European one, is an association between two persons for mutual support and the procreation and rearing of children. But it also has

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[1] Joe de Graft, loc. cit., p. 23.

the wider aspect of an alliance between groups of kin. Any marriage is, therefore, a matter of interest not only to the parents of both parties but to a wider circle of relatives, particularly the members of the lineage of the extended family.[1]

Any marriage as a rule requires the consent of the father or the head of the family. Individual choice of a partner when allowed is controlled by prohibitions or rules decreeing that the choice should be made within a limited range of circumscribed families. Traditionally, these prohibitions have directed parents in choosing the person and imposing her on the man or the man on the woman. When this happens in the modern African family, conflict arises. Girls no longer want to accept their parents' choices of marriage partners. However, the parents, in many instances, continue to wield their traditional influence. At times, these conflicts and resultant problems extend to the suitors concerned when the "bride-price" or "marriage money" collected from them on behalf of the girls has to be returned.

This marriage money or quid pro quo is given by the prospective husband or his senior relatives on his behalf to the parents of the girl. In some cases, parents go to the extreme of bargaining. The one who pays the highest in terms of money or goods gets the bride. However, the payment does not in anyway make the wife her husband's property or place her in the relationship of a slave to him. One crucial distinction between the status of a wife and that of a slave for example, is

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1 Lucy Mair, African Marriage and Social Change, London: Frank Cass and Company, Ltd., 1969, p. 4.

that the slave can be transferred by his owner to another man. In some societies, there used to be a practice whereby slaves traditionally formed part of the marriage payment.[1]

The influence of western culture has made this form of traditional betrothal and marriage a problem to most conservative parents. Their insistence on this practice and their children's constant rejection of their arbitrary choices often generate severe conflicts. Guillaume Oyono-Mbia looks at these tensions between the traditional outlook of old family communities and the more individualistic way of life of modern civilization in his play, Three Suitors: One Hisband.[2] This play concerns the efforts of a father to get the best possible bride-price for his "town educated" daughter, while she schemes to ensure that she marries the man she genuinely loves.

Even though Oyono-Mbia exaggerates many of the situations in his effort to make them comic, the main issue stands throughout, providing the central and basic conflict. The daughter, Juliette, returns home from a Secondary School with Oko, her fiance whom she intends to introduce to her family. To her bitter surprise, however, she discovers that other marriage arrangements for her future have already been made by her father, Atangana. Her extended family expects her to comply with these arrangements. The resulting clash symbolizes the conflict created by the two cultures--the traditional and the western.

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1 Ibid., p. 6.

2 Oyono-Mbia, Three Suitors: One Husband, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1968.

The most shocking revelation by the father is that as many as three suitors have been virtually accepted and various sums of money or bride price received from them. This has been a practice whereby some parents think more of the financial returns for themselves than of the comfort and happiness of their daughters. Juliette's grandmother, Bella explains the situation:

> Juliette: Nothing! I love him.
>
> Bella: (Indignantly): You must be out of your mind, Juliette! Since when do girls fall in love without the permission of their families? How can you disappoint us all like that? (She gets up and walks towards Juliette): I tell you again, my child, you must marry a great man! It's about time you too began bringing us food, drinks and other things from the city like Cecilia's been doing ever since she's been living with her European in Mbalmayo! It's about time we too became respectable people!
>
> Juliette: (Amused): Respectable? What do you..."[1]

This is the situation for poor Juliette; her family wants her to marry a "European." Here as often, "European" does not mean a white man or a person from Europe. To many poor Africans white men are synonymous with wealth, and so anybody who is rich in any form or who holds jobs once held by whites is a "white man." The three rich men from whom they got the various sums of money are in that concept "Europeans."

But Juliette, who has grown up with the new system, predictably refuses all the three suitors. She wants to marry the man of her own choice, not one imposed on her. This frustrates her parents' efforts to get the best possible marriage payment out of their arrangements. It is

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[1] Ibid., p. 25.

a problem which not only involves Juliette and her family but also the three suitors. Either the parents compel her to comply with their wishes, or let her alone and refund the various sums of money collected to the three men. This problem poses a question: "Is it possible to make room for the new order while at the same time preserving the old?" This is the situation Oyono-Mbia is concerned with in this play.

By sending their daughter to a secondary school, the family obviously makes room for the new order, but finds it very difficult to give up its traditional role. Juliette, however, eventually outwits the family and discreetly arranges to marry the man of her own choice. Juliette does this cunningly with the help of her literate cousin who has been able to convince the family that Oko has as bright a future as the two men who have already paid their bride-prices. When three leaves representing the suitors are placed on the floor, Juliette, of course, picks the one that belongs to Oko. This time, the family do not object to her decision but request Oko to pay a bride-price of three thousand dollars, thinking he will be unable to raise the money being a student.

Before the dateline for the payment of the money, Juliette discovers the three thousand dollars the first two men presented to her family. Secretly, she picks the amount and sends it to Oko through her cousin to be given to the family. Just at this time, the first two men begin demanding a refund of the various sums of money they have given to the family, and threatening law suit. Oko's money is therefore divided between the two men as repayments. Actually, it is their own money they have got back. Juliette, therefore, succeeds in making her own marital choice and preventing the payment of a bride-price.

Although Ama Ata Aidoo treats the same marriage problem, her play, Dilemma of a Ghost, presents a slightly different situation.[1]

The play is about Ato Yawson who returns with his Afro-American wife, Eulalie. The couple arrive in Ghana and there is immediate tension between them and Ato's family. Clearly, this is not so much because of the obvious difference in generations as it is due to the insensibility of the woman, Eulalie, who has been brought to Ghana, and the weakness of her husband who is unable to bridge the vast chasm which lies between her own western experience and the traditional life in Ghana. When the reconciliation comes eventually, it is the uneducated mother of the old order who brings it about with her compassion.

The family in this play does not object so much to the marriage. The main issue here is Eulalie's personal attitude and behaviour which are contrary to the culture in which she is to live. The more Ato Yawson tells his people about her, the more they become perplexed because the life she leads is a phenomenon they find very difficult to understand. Eulalie is a chain smoker and heavy coca cola imbiber.

Ato Yawson: (Looking tenderly at her): Sweetie Pie.

Eulalie: (Laughing again): Ain't you going teh say Poor Sweetie Pie? Ain't I poorer here as I would ave been in New York City? (In pathetic imitation of Ato): "Eulalie, my people say it is not good for a woman to take alcohol. Eulalie, my people say they are not pleased to see you smoke... Eulalie, my people say... My people... My people..." Damned rotten coward of a Moses. (Ato winces). I

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1 Ama Ata Aidoo, Dilemma of a Ghost, Ibadan: Caxton Press (W. A.), Ltd., 1970.

have been drinking inspite of what your people say. (She sits on the terrace facing the audience). Who married me, you or your goddam people?
(She stands and moves closer to Ato):
Why don't you tell them you promised me we would start having kids when I wanted them?

Ato Yawson: They won't understand.

Eulalie: And so you make them think I am incapable of having kids to save your own face?

Ato Yawson: It isn't that?

Eulalie: Sure not. What else would they understand but their own savage customs and standards?... And of course, you should have known that. Have they appreciation for anything but their own prehistoric existence? More savage than dinosaurs. With their snails and their potions! You afterwards told me, didn't you, that they wanted me to strip before them and have my belly washed? Washed in that filth! (She laughs mirthlessly). What did you tell them I was before you picked me, a strip-tease?...

Ato Yawson: Look here. I won't have you insult...

Eulalie: ... 'My people,' Add it, Moses...[1]

After such a long period of married life she and her husband show no signs of raising a family. This, of course, is in accordance with their planned parenthood through contraception. But the family does not understand because planned parenthood is not in conformity with traditional African marriage. Child bearing is one of the most cherished acts in a traditional marriage. This is the reason why Ato Yawson's family becomes worried about him, and his wife's long delay in bearing a child--the pride of marriage. The family attributes this delay to a possible

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[1] Ibid., p. 44.

barrenness of Eulalie.

Esi: (Ato's Mother): Her womb has receded, has it not? But did you make her know how important it is for her to...

Ato Yawson: But her womb has not receded!

Esi: (Unbelieving): What are you telling me?

Ato Yawson: If we wanted children, she would have given birth to some.

Esi: Ei, everyone should come and listen to this (She walks round in all directions indicating surprise). I have not heard anything like this before... Human beings deciding when they must have children? (To Ato): Meanwhile, where is God? (Ato is confused since he does not know how to reply to this)...yet only a woman who is barren will tell her neighbours such a tale.

Ato Yawson: But it can be done. ...But, Maami, in these days of civilization...

Esi: In these days of civilization what? Now I know you have been teaching your wife to insult us...

Ato Yawson: Oh Maami!

Esi: Is this not the truth? Why did you not tell us that you and your wife are gods and you can create your own children when you want them? ...You do not even tell us about anything and we assemble our medicines together. While all the time your wife laughs at us because we do not understand such things...[1]

This, of course, complicates the already bitter situation, and increases the family's spite for Eulalie and the marriage as a whole. The idea of contraception and family planning as explained by Ato Yawson does not convince any of them. They cannot reconcile themselves to contraception and family planning which are out of their culture. Nor can they

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[1] Ibid., p. 48.

support Eulalie's great smoking and coca cola drinking habit.

Ato Yawson's moral weakness, unfortunately also contributes to the explosion of the situation. He oscillates indecisively from side to side as a desperate and unwilling interpreter, and fails completely to reconcile the two opposing cultures. He has apparently forgotten one--his traditional culture, because of his absence from the country presumably, and has imperfectly understood the other. Finally when all "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world..."[1] and everything appears lost, the good sense of the mother comes to the rescue, and all is well. The rejected one now is Ato Yawson, the new man, who, in his fumbling for a revolution in the traditional culture, has not or is unable to touch the central core of the two cultural differences. The Reconciliation between Eulalia and the family when it eventually happens through the strength and generosity of tradition, is so contrary to everything that has gone before, and is, therefore, a bit artificial and there unconvincing. There is not finally enough dramatic movement and tension in the play. Despite the many scene changes--lights going out or curtains coming down--Dilemma of a Ghost is a very delightful piece of writing containing much wisdom.[2]

It is evident from the play that with the impact of western influence, men can disregard traditional practice and marry anyone from any culture. But the complexities of fusing the two cultures so involved

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1 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems. New York: Macmillan Company, 1956, p. 184.

2 C. J. Rea, "Cultural Line," African Forum (Summer, 1965), pp. 112-113.

will for some time be a problem.

Another aspect of the marriage tradition is treated by James Ngugi[1] in his play, The Black Hermit.

In many African societies one automatically marries his brother's widow when he dies. Usually, it is the one who in age immediately follows the deceased brother who marries the widow. The parents' influence on this kind of marriage is even more tremendous than on the normal marriage. This traditional marriage is always effected regardless of the fact that one is already married, or has other marital plans. With the influence of western culture and the exposure of the younger generation to all sorts of ideas, this traditional insistence on the practice has been a cause of many problems in some families.

This is the main issue and the problem on which The Black Hermit is based. James Ngugi brings into the play a situation which makes it very impossible for Remi to marry his late brother's widow, Thoni. Long before she formally married his brother, Remi had secretly been in love with Thoni, and even clandestinely adored her. But he could not reveal to her how much he loved her because as he confessed: "I was a dumb sufferer,"[2] when later Thoni married his own brother he considered it a betrayal of love. Since then he had lost interest and affection for her. This is one of the reasons why he does not want to comply with this

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1 James Ngugi who has since resumed his original Kikuyu name is now called Ngugi waThiong'O.

2 James Ngugi, The Black Hermit. Malta: St. Paul's Press Ltd., 1968, p. 28.

traditional norm by marrying her. Inspite of Remi's objections which seem tangible from the sociological and psychological point of view, his father calls him and insists: "Remi, you know our custom Your brother's wife is now your wife."[1] However, Remi still objects to the idea because he does not want, among other things, to fill the emptiness in Thoni's heart and soothe her grief for her true "husband." He says:

> I had already reconciled myself to the fact that she was my brother's wife. And she was. How then could I take another man's wife? I wanted a woman of my own. But if I married this girl, how could I ever get it out of my head that she belonged to another? Could I see her as my wife? No. No. It is not that I am very religious. She no longer means anything to me.[2]

Later when the family's reaction becomes very compelling and unbearable, Remi has to change his mind. But it is a sham. Soon after the marriage he becomes convinced that he will not be happy with Thoni. He, therefore, runs away from this girl and from his people to the city where he will be safer from the clutches of tradition. He does this at a time when his presence in the community is most needed. As the first graduate in his tribe many people need his services.

> I had the misfortune of being the first in my tribe to reach university. Elders listened to my voice. I wrote them letters, virtually ordering them to support the Africanist Party. And during vacations I held meetings everywhere and told them: Join the Africanist Party.[3]

When he returns home eventually, as he says, "to serve my people,

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1 Ibid., p. 34.

2 Ibid., p. 34.

3 Ibid., p. 31.

save them from traditions and bad custom, and free them from tribal manacles," he comes as one needed by the community, but not because of Thoni, necessarily. The marriage, of course, has been unsuccessful. The lack of mutual love has resulted in conflicts and eventually a break.

Ngugi's portrayal of Remi cannot be considered abominable. Remi is not to be considered unhumanitarian or disrespectful. His character does not show any unpatriotic tendencies either. He is only questioning a traditional practice which has become unproductive and unpopular. In putting forth this issue, however, Ngugi touches on too many things--tribal customs, national allegiance, religion, family and sexual love--in his attempt to prove Remi's stand in refusing to marry his brother's widow. The play has been much criticized because of this.[1] Ngugi should have concentrated on the main issue and developed it in a significant and memorable dramatic action.

Ngugi's treatment of the controversial traditional marrying of a brother's widow, however, is noteworthy. He has made it abundantly clear that a successful marriage depends on love and affection, and those who contract this union should be allowed to decide for themselves.

In another of Ama Ata Aidoo's play, Anowa, the family conflict is again portrayed. The main issue in this play is the parents' traditional control of the choice of marital partner. The play deals with the frustration of Anowa's marriage plans by her parents' refusal to sanction her choice of husband. This leads her and her man into a voluntary exile which results in the tragic death of both of them.

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[1] Gerald Moore, "Review of The Black Hermit," Transition 3, 8 (1963), p. 35.

When Anowa finally decides to marry this man, Kofi Ako, after she had turned down proposals from many favourites of her parents, the whole family turn against her choice.

> Anowa: Mother, you have been at me for a long time to get married. And now that I have found someone I like very much to marry...
>
> Badua: (Her Mother): Anowa, shut up! Push your tongue into your mouth and close it. Shut up because I never counted Kofi Ako among my sons-in-law. Anowa, why Kofi Ako? Of all the mothers that are here in Yebi, should I be the one whose daughter would want to marry this fool, this good-for-nothing cassavaman, this watery male of all watery males?[1]

Objections are raised because, among other things, Kofi Ako is a "nincompoop." Anowa's parents consider him lazy and unambitious. But Anowa sees some latent virtues in him. This is the reason why Anowa is forced to run away with Kofi Ako and get married in peace.

As hermits, Kofi Ako and Anowa live and work together until death parts them. All has not been well with the marriage, though. Kofi Ako's involvement in slavery for wealth despite Anowa's objections to it, and his unfortunate impotency have worsened their relationship and contributed to their final destruction.

> Anowa: And tell me, when did I enter into a discussion with you about that? I shall not feel happy with slaves around... Kofi, no man made a slave of his friend and came to much himself. It is wrong. It is evil.

Even though the marriage ends tragically, one thing that is very important to note is the fact that mutual love and agreement have brought

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[1] Ama Ata Aidoo, Anowa, London: Longmans, 1970, pp. 14-15.

them together as husband and wife. At least they have been able to decide for themselves regardless of what tradition has laid down. Their death can, therefore, be attributed to a particular misfortune, something which can befall anybody, anywhere.

What Ama Ata Aidoo is concerned with in this play, and what in fact needs re-appraisal in the society depicted, is the basic cause of the couple's desertion of the entire society. And this is the parents' objection to the marriage. On many occasions Anowa has refused to be married to men whom her parents approve of. This is obviously because she does not love those suitors. If she comes now with somebody she wants to marry it goes without saying that he is the man she loves. But her parents disapprove of the marriage because they suspect the man is not diligent enough. This compels Anowa to run away from the town to marry Kofi Ako. They would have lived among their people if the parents had consented and given a blessing to their union. All the mounting problems which finally lead to their deaths might not have occurred. This leads to the question as to whether parental uncompromising control of the choice of one's marital partner is still necessary.

All the plays discussed in this chapter deal exclusively with family conflicts involving parents and their children. These problems arise as a result of the children's attempt to stamp out some specific traditional practices which to them obstruct progress. They want to be free to choose their own professions and marital partners, and to have a say in what concerns them as individuals in the family. From the analyses, it could be seen that the parents have not been insensitive to the children's demands. In most cases, they have disregarded their traditional authority

and have allowed their children to decide for themselves. If anything at all, it is those who brought western ideas and values into the traditional African society who are to be blamed.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL CONFLICTS INVOLVING MAN AND SOCIETY

Religion permeates the whole culture of the African. It is the strongest element--the greatest influence on the life of the African people. It provides the master key for understanding and behaviour in the society. Since it forms part and parcel of life, one cannot separate it and say this is religion and that is another thing.[1]

There is a belief in the Supreme Being who plays an important role in all aspects of life.[2] He is referred to in Ghana, for example, among some social groups as grandfather. Among the Gas, he is Naa Nyogmo; among the Adangmes, he is Tsaatse Mau; and among the Ewes, he is Torgbi. This is in line with the belief that the 'grandfather' was the first ancestor, and everybody stands in line with him. Next to the Supreme Being are the ancestors who are considered intermediaries and held in high esteem. The respect that is given to the ancestors is in line with the tradition in which old age is given respect and reverence.

Since life continues in death, the ancestors need food to sustain them. That is the reason why there is an annual feeding of these ancestors, usually during festivals and sacrifices.[3] Worship is contained

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1 John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1967, p. 75.

2 John Mbiti, Concepts of God in Africa. London: S.P.C.K., 1970, pp. 8-12.

3 John Mbiti, loc. cit., p. 107.

in sacrifices and rituals. All these form parts of the total fulfillment of a particular religious ceremony. The sacrifices and rituals are practices inspired by fear of the spirits and the cult of ancestor worship. And the victims range from inanimate things to human beings. The impact of colonial power and influence has brought many oppositions to, and conflicts with these cultural practices. Even though this friction has brought some problems to the traditional African people, this colonial influence has caused the loss of much of the traditional character of the sacrifices and rituals.

One aspect of this custom is the ritual which finds its expression in the sacrifice of the young, in some cases considered evil, to the gods. It, at times, follows a regular pattern; children who fall into a certain category, for instance, the tenth child, are sacrificed as evil ones.[1] In other cases, the sacrifices are believed to be demanded by a specific god or Oracle. And this has to be fulfilled. It is on this kind of sacrifice that Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin bases his play, Oda Oak Oracle.[2]

Oda Oak Oracle is a very pleasant and delightful piece of work. Its poetic language has helped to lift its subject above its simplistic perspective, and has added to its richness. The author himself says that the play is about "a legend of black peoples, told of gods and God,

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1 F. J. Amon D'Aby, The Triumph of The Evil Tenth Child, The play is translated from the French by Baldwin W. Burroughs. It is bound but not dated.

2 Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, Oda Oak Oracle, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.

of hope and love, and of fears and sacrifices."[1] He discusses in this play, the traditional belief whereby a god or an oracle is considered the guardian of a society. This god controls the behaviour of the society, and even in some cases can impose a specific obligation on a person; for instance, he can designate whom one should marry.

In this particular play, the victim is Shanka, the major character. The conflict begins when he refuses to know the warmth of his bride, a woman believed to have been chosen for him by the Oracle of Oda Oak, guardian of the people. This he does because the Oracle had ordained that their first-born son should be sacrificed for the satisfaction of the ancestral spirits. Goa, who knew about this, and who is a friend of Shanka (and yet secretly an admirer of his wife, Ukutee) promises to go personally to the sacred Oda Oak to face the Oracle on their behalf, in order to convince him. This he promises to do with the hope that Shanka and Ukutee should be freed from the ordained sacrifice.

Goa's gesture fails and Shanka sticks to his abstinence. This refusal to know the warmth of his bride is, of course, a defilement of the Oracle's pronouncements. Shanka knows the consequences--he knows what will happen to him personally, and to the community as whole. He is aware of the wrath that will come to him from the people but he still disregards his wife, not even when Goa advises him:

> "Sacrifice, you know,
> Is the sole desire of the dead,
> The Ultimate defilement, Shanka.

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1 Ibid., Fly leaf.

It has always been so."[1]

Shanka asserts that if the dead know no mercy, he will never know his bride. If he does not know her warmth, there will consequently be no pregnancy which may result in a son being born and eventually get sacrificed to the gods. This is as simple as that. His stand expectedly brings him into bitter conflict not only with the Oracle, but also with his people. They believe that his defiance will bring disaster to the community. This is based on the belief that all the good things they get--rich soil, harvests, health and fertility, to mention but a few, come from the Oracle. So while the Oracle himself accuses Shanka of defiling the wisdom of the dead and the age-old role of ritual fulfillment, the people assail him for bringing a curse upon the land.

But Shanka does not get embittered even when he discovers the secret dealings between his bride and bosom friend, Goa, which result in pregnancy. At least, the pregnancy is not by him. At the Oracle's shrine, he humbly obeys all the pronouncements and goes through the punishments and ordeals. As a result of the god's wrath, Goa and his wife die. But he cannot be blamed for the tragedy. Despite the fact that people have died because of his action, his aim has been achieved, he has not produced a child for the Oracle. Ukutee delivers before she dies but the child happens to be a daughter, "profane for a sacrifice." However, he suffers banishment, together with the child.

Gabre-Medhin sees these sacrifices as not in keeping with humanitarian practices. Shanka is able to prevent his ritual sacrifice only through the loss of other lives though. But the problem still remains

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[1] Ibid., p. 7.

to be solved. The Oracle will continue to demand other sons as long as the people still believe in him. The problem, therefore, rests with the people, not with the Oracle. By the way Shanka is portrayed, Gabre-Medhin evidently suggests a review of this custom.

Another aspect of the traditional ritual is discussed in Rebecca Njau's play, The Scar. This play is about the emancipation of women, and deals with female circumcision which initiates girls into womanhood. In most societies in Africa, girls have to pass through some rituals of initiation before they become women.[1] In some of the places, a girl may not get a husband from a particular society if she does not go through the initiation. But just as the societies vary, the form this initiation takes also varies. Some societies do it without the act of circumcision while others consider this as the central rite.[2]

The Scar discusses a ritual which involves female circumcision, and a betrothal of the girl concerned to a man soon afterwards. With the advent of western culture, there has been much oppositions to this practice. To Rebecca Njau, the whole ritual ceremony amounts to enslavement and subjection of women. As such she advocates a review. Her major character who fights against the practice is a victim herself. To effectively wage this crusade, Mariana deserts her own society and establishes an institution elsewhere, where she educates the young girls. Being a victim herself, she teaches the girls about the evils of the ritual and

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1 John Mbiti, loc. cit., p. 158.

2 Rebecca Njau, The Scar, Moshie-Tanzania: Kibo Art Gallery, 1965.

the subsequent betrothal to men against their will. She does not want them to suffer the same inhumanities and ill-treatments she passed through. The man who was forced on her soon after her initiation betrays her.

This man who now calls himself Yohanna is a pastor and has realized the sin he committed with her and has come to express his repentance and apology. However, even though he comes in good faith, his confession has been a total destruction for Mariana. All along she has kept her past secret. This is obviously her tragic-flaw.

Pastor: I know what I did makes you drunk with fury;
Forget my rotten heart and forgive me;
I was a hypocrite and a cheat;
Now I have seen the light;
Now I want peace in my heart;
But how shall I get that peace
If I do not kneel before God and before you
And before the "Brethren" and confess this sin?
Do you think it is easy for me a pastor to stand
and lay bare my past?
Do you think it is a pleasure for me to do it?
No, Mariana, it's nothing but shame.
Yet my heart cannot rest until the whole thing
is out.

Mariana: Do you want to expose me before the Brethren -
before the whole village?
Pastor, my work is my life; it must be preserved...
Don't reveal my sin in revealing yours, pastor;
For that will be the end of my work - it will
even be the end of my tenderest plant that must
grow
In secret.[1]

Yohanna's confession now reveals her past experiences to the people among whom she works, and this results in a loss of faith in her. The people misunderstand her and rise against her for deceiving and misleading them.

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[1] Rebecca Njau, The Scar, Nairobi: Kibo Art Gallery, 1965, p. 23.

Her crusade, therefore, summarily comes to an end. But even though she fails to emancipate the girls fully, she has been able to stir public thinking about female circumcision and suppression.

It becomes evident in the play that Rebecca Njau is very concerned with the emancipation of women in the society. The fact that Yohanna comes back to Mariana after many years of separation, and asks for forgiveness and repentance means he has actually regretted his act. He has recognized the unjustices of the initiation ceremony. He is, therefore, portrayed as an example of men realizing the evils of women's circumcision and forced betrothal to men.

One of the most frustrating problems in many African societies now is depicted in R. A. Cantey's play, The Mystery of a Cockrow. This play is about the matrilineal inheritance which is practiced among the Akan peoples in Ghana, and among people in the Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe (Northern Rhodesia), Zambia, Tanzania and Zaire.[1] The facts of this play are based on the matrilineal system as practiced among the Akans (the Twis and Fantes) in Ghana.

There are many stories and beliefs concerning the origin, the evolution and diffusion of the practice of matrilineal descent and inheritance. An example is the Ashanti belief that it is only the women who can transmit blood to descendants--male or female. Under no circumstances whatsoever can a male transmit his blood which he derived from a woman. In consequence, no Ashanti can, according to this orthodox belief, have

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1 Lucy Mair, loc. cit., p. 2.

a drop of the male parent's blood in his veins.[1]

Clan descent is, therefore, traced through the female, and authority in the family lies in the hands of the mother's brother, the maternal uncle or wofa as he is called in Ghana. The mother does not stand alone, for behind her stands a united family bound by the ties of blood. Her children belong to her and her clan, not to her husband. Thus they belong to the lineage of the mother. Furthermore, the children do not inherit from their father. The maternal uncle waits patiently and when his sister's husband dies he takes over everything. This whole practice generates conflicts between the father's desire to have his wife and children under his authority, and the claims of the woman's relatives to keep their woman and children under their control.

This is the issue R. A. Cantey is concerned with in The Mystery of a Cockcrow. According to this play, the matrilineal inheritance brings nothing into homes or the society as a whole other than chaos, strife and eventually death. This happens especially when the husband is rich. In the first place, since the children are not traditionally for the father, his control over them is never systematic. Interference does come from the woman's family who may want the children brought up in a special or different way.

But the main opposition comes from the maternal uncle who has the absolute and undisputable right to succeed him.[2] What he hopes for is

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1 R. S. Rattray, Ashanti. London University Press, 1955, pp. 77-86.

2 Ibid., p. 80.

the early death of his sister's husband in order to inherit from him. If this man does not die as early as he wishes, he plans to kill him. On assuming control he forces the children out. If the poor children resist there is further strife and loss of lives. The children, therefore, gain nothing materially from their father. They have to fend for themselves. It is only in rare cases that this uncle allows the children to live with him. However, when this does occur, they do not have any claim to any property belonging to their father. This means that they may have to cancel any future plans they have, and what comes out of this is frustration and child delinquency.

In the play, R. A. Cantey portrays the legitimate successor as Yao Gyima of no clear-cut or well-defined business, knowing very well that he has Obeng his aunts husband from whom he will inherit. Even though Obeng does not die at the hands of Gyima, many attempts to shorten his life have been made.

Gyima: I am anxious to get rid of him (Obeng) immediately.

Ntim: Don't worry. Dansin is a powerful juju man; his charms never fail. That is why we recommended him to you. Did you see how swiftly matters worked? Precisely a day after you went to him his charms began to work for you.

Gyima: I saw it and wondered. I have what he gave me. He says I should invoke it as soon as I hear that my uncle is recovering. In this way no one would suspect anything.

Oware: Then why are you anxious? Have confidence that you are Yaw Obeng's successor.

Gyima: Well, here is a bottle of gin. Let us use it to wash our food down.

Ntim: There is nothing wrong in that.

Oware: Let us pour it down quickly and go away.

Kwaning: Open the bottle and begin, Gyima.

Gyima: (Pours a glassful and drinks): 'Phuen!'
Over the head of Yaw Obeng the rogue.[1]

Gyima's trap in the woods climaxes his attempts to kill Obeng and inherit his property. This also reveals among other things the evil machinations which the Akan matrilineal system can produce. Obeng however finds out Gyima's evil intentions and he writes down his will concerning the sharing of his property among his children.

The main problem, however, is not solved since the whole matrilineal inheritance is not reviewed. This is what the play is concerned with. As a propagandist play, it advocates a re-appraisal of the practice by making it abundantly clear that such an outmoded traditional custom as matrilineal inheritance does not help the economic and social growth of the society.

Efua Sutherland's play, Foriwa, also discusses an aspect of the social problem. The Europeans who came to Africa, particularly West Africa, first settled on the coasts. Even though their missionary and educational activities were later extended northwards, the western influence on the Southern part, especially of Ghana was greater. Gradually, the coastal lands became better developed, and the people better educated. As a result of this western impact most southerners look down upon those from the north as uncivilized and as such inferior.

It is this problem arising from the unfortunate attitudes of

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1 R. A. Cantey, The Mystery of Cockcrow, Accra: Ghana Publishing Corp., 1971, p. 38.

southerners towards northerners that Efua Sutherland portrays in her play, Foriwa.[1] One thing which makes this play effective is that there are other elements in it which also discuss problems in the society. These sub-plots include parents' gratuitous interference in their daughters' choice of husbands, and the frequent exodus of people from the rural to urban areas. While the former brings about family conflicts and unhappiness, the latter results in unequal development. As a result of the exodus, the rural areas always lag behind in economic and social development.

The main issue in Foriwa, however, is sectionalism, or "tribalism" as it is commonly called in West Africa, especially Ghana. Sectionalism and nepotism are major problems in most of the developing nations in Africa today. However, the play is based on one aspect of this sectionalism as practiced in Ghana. It portrays the achievements of Labaran, a northerner, in a southern town inhabited by those who consider themselves to be more educated and more dignified. As an educated man he is more concerned with unity and national progress than with isolationism and conceit. So he leaves his own town in the north for a town in the south where he believes progress is necessary. Labaran remarks on his arrival at the town, Kyerefaso:

> "I was impatient at the beginning; in haste.
> Seeing the raggedness of my people's homes,
> I was ashamed, even angry. I heard it
> screamed: Progress! Development! I wanted
> it for everyone and everywhere."[2]

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[1] Efua Sutherland, Foriwa, Accra: State Publishing Corp., 1967.

[2] Ibid., p. 1.

Labaran discovers that this southern town is inadequate inspite of the pomposity and pride of the southerners. He calls the homes, "my people's homes" knowing that all of them are one--they belong to one nation.

He does not go about preaching to them about the decadence and the inadequacies of the town but to the dismay of the people he settles down to work. He gives the problems a practical and realistic approach by clearing the squalor and slowly transforming the village. At first, the townsfolks consider him mad. Later, when they discover that he is from the north because of his tribal marks they call him all sorts of degrading names.

Foriwa: Where does him come from?

Postmaster: Oh! yes. From the north.

Foriwa: And they call him stranger here?...[1]

Incidentally, Foriwa is one of the few people in the town who abhors sectionalism and shares the spirit of nationalism with Labaran. This is the reason why she is very disturbed about his being called 'stranger.'

However, Labaran himself is neither disturbed nor discouraged by the immoral utterances and the unfriendly attitudes towards him. He continues to work until his endeavours begin to show practical results. It is at this stage that the townsfolks begin to see his importance and show interest in his work. The social barrier and uncooperative attitude towards those from the north is broken. As a result, the development which has come to the town under Labaran's leadership is tremendous and remarkable.

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[1] Ibid., p. 23.

Among the natives who returned to the town to help are women who originally vowed not to marry in the town, and men who left to live and work in the cities. They have all returned to help in the town's development. And the one who has showed them the light and given them the initiative is one who has been hitherto considered uncivilized and socially inferior.

By portraying Labaran in such a character, Efua Sutherland obviously advocates the eschewal of sectionalism. She believes in the spirit of national cooperation or nationalism inspite of whatever influence a section of the country may have. This is one of the most important moral attitudes in all developing countries. It is by pooling all resources together and working in the spirit of brotherhood that the development of any country can be accelerated.

It is interesting to note that many African governments are presently embarking on this policy of national unity and cooperation in their development programs. In Ghana, for instance, the government is doing its best through legislation, to stamp out all feelings of isolationism. In its rural development and voluntary work programs, volunteers are sent to any part of the country where work needs to be done. This is helping appreciably in building a strong national spirit.

Wole Soyinka makes a contribution to the solution of the problems in his excellent play, The Lion and the Jewel. This play is a kind of African beauty. It is very hilarious, and the conventions of polygamy in it simply add to the possibilities of what is called 'bedroom farce.'[1]

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[1] Sangodare Akanji, "Notes on The Lion and the Jewel," Black Orpheus, 6 (1965), pp. 50-51.

It features a proud young African girl, Sidi. She is wooed by the school teacher, Lakunle, who talks to her of romantic love and other things he considers 'civilized.' But all this is lost on Sidi who merely wonders why Lakunle has failed to pay the dowry or bride-price if he is so keen to marry her.

The School teacher with his muffled ideas about 'civilization' is a tragicomic figure. He does not really know what he is talking about, yet he feels infinitely superior to the 'bush' people in the village to whom he announces the inevitable coming of 'progress.'

> "Within a year or two, I swear,
> This village shall see transformation
> Bride-price will be a thing forgotten
> And wives shall take their place by men.
> We'll buy saucepans for all the women
> Clay pots are crude and unhygenic
> No man shall take more wives than one
> That's why they are impotent too soon...
> We must reject the palm wine habit.
> And take to tea, with milk and sugar...
> (Talking to Sidi)
>
> Together we shall sit at table
> --Not on the floor--and eat,
> Not with fingers, but with knives
> And forks, and breakable plates
> Like civilized beings."[1]

He and Sidi talk at cross purposes. Sidi has always been dubious about his advances. Now she decides to discard him because her picture, taken by a travelling European, has appeared on a magazine cover. She then sets out to conquer the beast in the person of the aged Bale, the ruler of the town, whom she is made to believe is impotent. Her advances prove the contrary and to the horror of her young suitor, the self

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[1] Wole Soyinka, The Lion and the Jewel, London: Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 36.

conscious and prudish school teacher, she ends up as the Baroka's latest addition to his harem.

The main conflict which is also the main issue in The Lion and the Jewel is the conflict of the new order with the old, in this particular case, the struggle between progress and tradition. The Lion in the play is Baroka, the Bale of Ilujinle, a reputedly important and aging tribal ruler, who is set against the pseudo-progressive, young school teacher in a contest for the belle of the village, Sidi, the jewel of the play. Lakunle represents the new weak order in the society, striving for superficial western innovation. However, he is no match for the Bale who is neither impotent nor senile as people think, but is steeped in traditional wisdom and strength. His insistence on realistic African situations brings him into conflict with Lakunle and his western innovation. But this does not mean that Baroka is against progress. He says in the play: "I do not hate progress, only its nature which makes all roofs and faces look all the same."[1] He merely fears the "reckless broom that will be wielded in these years to come," to sweep away all traces of his culture.

Lakunle's rejection of the whole traditional practices of the village brings him to a fall. He not only has partial western education but has also semi-broadened his experience and scope of mental vision through his periodic visits to the big cities in Nigeria. This is enough to make him a 'whiteman,' and alienate him from his society. As a school teacher in the village he considers it his singular duty to

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[1] Ibid., p. 24.

transform the whole community by bringing civilization into the village. To him, the traditional practices are : "Savage, barbaric and outmoded."[1] He wants the women to stop carrying things on the head, for this "shortens their neck." He does not want to conform with tradition and pay Sidi's bride-price even though he is deeply in love. To him the payment of the bride-money makes one a "mere property."

Lakunle expects too much. One wonders how he can hope to change the realistic African practices he preaches against. For example, how can he expect the people in the village to eat bones with forks and knives, and the women to stop carrying things on the head when they have no automobiles, coaches or carts to transport the things. These unrealistic approaches on the part of Lakunle, coupled with his ardent love for Sidi bring him into conflict with Baroka, the chief and custodian of tradition. Unfortunately for Lakunle, Baroka is also in love with Sidi and he wants her for a wife. His affection for her deepens after her beautiful picture has appeared on the front cover of a magazine. And knowing that a union between him and her will help him achieve traditional respectability he pretends to be impotent in order to get her.

Baroka: The time has come when I can fool myself
No more. I am no man, Sadiku. My manhood
Ended near a year ago.

Sadiku: The gods forbid.

Baroka: I wanted Sidi because I still hoped--
A foolish thought I know, but still--I hoped
That, with a virgin young and hot within,
My failing strength would rise and save my pride.
(Sadiku begins to moan)

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[1] Ibid., p. 7.

A waste of hope. I knew it even then.
But it's a human failing never to accept
The worst; and so I pondered to my vanity.
When manhood must, it ends.
The well of living, tapped beyond its depths,
Dries up, and mocks the wostrel in the end.
I am withered and unsapped, the joy
Of ballad-mongers, the aged butt
Of youth's ribaldry.

Sadiku: (Tearfully): The Gods must have mercy yet.

Baroka: (As if suddenly aware of her presence, starts up):
I have told this to no one but you,
Who are my eldest, my most faithful wife.
But if you dare parade my shame before the world...[1]

This does not, in any way, mean that Baroka is a villain. The main difference between him and Lakunle is that he is realistic to the African situations and he gives practical approaches to them. He stops the construction of the railway line because he feels it is not necessary at the moment. As soon as the magazine is out, he displays Sidi's picture on the front cover. And in wooing her, he goes straight to the point without any unnecessary display of oratory, as Lakunle does. "The monkey sweats•It is only the hair upon his back which still deceives the world...[2] Sidi who is caught between the Baroka and Lakunle finally marries the former. Superficially this could mean Sidi does that because Baroka is a better lover, But that is not the case. The real point is that Baroka has been realistic--a practical lover. His action is, therefore, a symbol of African realism. He seduces Sidi because he believes her presence as a wife will help him advance harmony among the people and bring about

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1 Ibid., p. 29.

2 Ibid., p. 31.

progress in the village. His ideas are, therefore, more important than the actions in themselves.

This means that African realism must be borne in mind when thinking of progress and innovation. Wole Soyinka realizes this, hence his treatment of the African tradition with admiration and the erroneous western culture with contempt, in the play.

All the characters are, however, ridiculed in the play. The author keeps his audience laughing by this, and he manages to give his plot a number of surprising turns that keep the audience in suspense. One thing about Lakunle is that he has not been consistent and practical. This makes him "unadmirable." When he is asked to take part in the traditional dances and mimes, he forgets his veneer of western civilization, and he does so for he takes part with zest.

It is important to note the fact that even though the play is African, Sidi has not been fully presented as a traditional African girl. This is evidenced from what she does and says. It is uncommon for a traditional African girl to solely decide on her marriage. But here we see Sidi whom Lakunle wants to "civilize," demanding a bride-price all by herself. Nothing is heard from or about her parents. Throughout the play, there is no conscious affirmation of negritude, but inspite of this, the play is clearly African, warning western innovators not to forget the realistic African situations.

The analyses of the plays show that the younger generation want a cultural transformation in the society. It could be seen from this chapter that they not only want a right in the family to make their own decisions, they also require the society as a whole to be rid of all

customs which they consider outmoded, and as such, not in keeping with modern civilization.

Those from the older generation seem to understand the problems and in some cases they try to compromise with the yough. In other cases they rightfully tell the innovators to be mindful of the African realities in their attempt to change the traditional practices.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Theatre is one of the elements which builds up the consciousness of social groups as a means of education. Theatrical performances could be used as appeals to inspire collective action by inviting the public to participate and carry back the actions into real life. They could also be used in breaking down unpopular traditional family structures and free the people from the weight of customs which constitute an opposition and impediment to progress.

In a developing continent like Africa, where the people are faced with conflicting traditional and western values, the role of the theatre is, therefore, very important. John Pepper Clark once said that even though his "pet medium" of information was poetry, he considered drama the most important in Africa because drama communicates with a larger audience than either poetry or the novel.[1] One might be illiterate but he can see and interpret a set, and hear the dialogue of a play. This helps the illiterate man, as well as the educated, to know what goes on in the society in which he lives.

Each of the plays discussed in the preceding chapters has something very important to say about what is going on in the culture as a result of western influence. And the solution of the inherent problems depends on how the people understand and evaluate these two conflicting cultures.

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[1] Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse, African Writers Talking, New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1972, p. 72.

Hence, the need of cultural education of the people in the society. The analyses of the plays show that the conflict is now mainly between the conservative older generation who still insist on the traditional practices, and the younger generation who have been brought up with the new order. To the younger generation, the more obsolete and unproductive customs should give way to more progressive ones--traditional or alien. What they want are cultural practices that will bring harmony and aid progress. Because they have been brought up with the new system, they see nothing wrong with the adoption of western values that are compatible with the African realism. They want a cultural revolution.

This brings them into the conflict with the older generation who still believe that the traditional practices are the best and insist on their preservation and observance. The problem that arises from this conflict is thus: the need to preserve good traditions and at the same time graft upon them suitable ones from other cultures, in this case, western culture. In order to have a harmonious synchronization both cultures need a thorough re-appraisal, This will help to know which of the traditional practices are to be retained, and which of the alien ones are to be adopted. Once this objective is achieved the culture in Africa will have a definite pattern.

Already the two opposing forces in the cultural conflict have been liberal. The older generation, for instance, while insisting on tradition have made room for the co-existence of tradition and western culture. Ofosu in Joe de Graft's, Songs and Daughters, wants his children to receive western education while he insists on traditional rights of choosing professions for them. Later, he realizes his interference in his

children's affairs and allows them to pursue the courses they are interested in. The people of Kyerefaso in Efua Sutherland's Foriwa realize that Labaran, the northerner is as Ghanaian as anybody from the south and that sectionalism retards the progress of a nation.

In Ama Ata Aidoo's, Dilemma of a Ghost, Ato Yawson disregards traditional life and marries Eulalie. Back home, he realizes that the most important thing is not the marriage. It is the difficult task of bringing and fusing two vastly different cultures together. However, the very family which opposes the marriage reconciles later with them and all is well. This shows some liberalism on the part of the older generation. Yohanna in Rebecca Njau's, The Scar, comes back to Mariana after many years of separation, and asks for forgiveness for the "sin" he committed with her soon after her initiation ceremonies.

Juliette's refusal to marry either of the three men chosen for her in Oyono-Mibia's, Three Suitors: One Husband, even though painful, does not come as a surprise to the family. The parents see some good in western values otherwise Juliette would not have been sent to secondary school, yet they find it very difficult to give up their traditional rights. In the light of these conflicting cultures the most important thing to do in order to salvage the situation is to embark on cultural education. A nation is built on a culture, and it is this tradition which orders her behaviour and forms her heritage. Without the cultural education, the two cultures in Africa the traditional and the western, will continue to conflict and bring disharmony in the society. The result will continue to be retardation in Africa's progress.

Everyone in the society must be made to understand the cultural

problems and the need to get rid of some of the traditional practices as well as some of the western values. The objective should not only be to encourage the good traditional practices but to blend these indigenous cultures with western ones as well as those of other countries which will conform with Africa's realism. With the interdependence of countries in this modern world this cultural exchange is essential.

The programme should foster practices that please the eye or the ear. If this is done well, Ato Yawson's family, for instance, will understand Eulalie's heavy smoking and drinking habits. The education programme should also foster practices that appeal to the intellect, most importantly the moral aspect of man. This was dramatically illustrated when Shakespeare's Hamlet says:

> "The play's the thing wherein I'll catch
> The conscience of the King." Act. II, Scene 1.

In this cultural education, there is a need to 'catch the conscience of the people' and make them understand the cultural trends in Africa in this twentieth century. The revolution does not fall on the shoulders of dramatists alone because the cultural problems need a practical approach. Every individual in the community has to put the transformed practices into rightful operation - for the benefit of all. The plays that the dramatists write with a view to solving the problems should be such that everybody can understand and learn something from them. It is only when the two conflicting generations get to understand that Africa is now in a situation in which only the most suitable traditions can bring harmony to the society, that the problems will find a solution.

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